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SUBJECT: HAITI ELECTIONS: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH OAS
ELECTIONS CHIEF

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Foley. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Ambassador Foley met with Ambassador Denneth Modeste and newly arrived OAS elections unit chief Elisabeth Spehar April 13, to discuss the current status of the Haitian electoral process. Ambassador Foley opened the meeting by affirming that the USG is categorically committed to the current elections calendar which would have the new Haitian president sworn into office February 7, 2006. Modeste agreed that the calendar must be respected. Spehar reported that with the voter registration process now scheduled to begin April 25, the elections timetable could be adhered to. Modeste told Ambassador that he was extremely pleased to have Spehar on board at the OAS Special Mission as she "knows her onions" having spent several years directing the OAS's Unit for the Promotion of Democracy.

12. (C) Modeste and Spehar also raised concerns regarding the staffing and infrastructure of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP), citing serious reservations as to whether the CEP was up to the enormous task it faces. Ambassador Foley pointed out that the issue of a weak counterpart institution was not unique to the elections arena but was true across the board in Haiti and we must play with the cards we are dealt. When probed for specific actions that the Ambassador could undertake to address the shortcomings, Modeste requested that the Ambassador approach CEP member Pierre-Richard Duchemin to advocate that the CEP accept OAS assistance through its institution strengthening project by staffing the two most important positions of Director General and Director of Operations. The staffing of these two positions by candidates with appropriate experience has the potential to greatly facilitate the work of the CEP. However, for OAS assistance to be available, the candidates would have to be acceptable to both the OAS and the CEP. (Note: Progress on this issue has been stymied due to the CEP's suggested candidates being the result of political patronage and/or nepotism. Ambassador subsequently called Duchemin and urged him to accept the OAS offer of assistance. End note.) Modeste and Spehar were unequivocal in their endorsement of Duchemin as the "best of the lot."

13. (C) Modeste told the Ambassador that SRSJ Juan Gabriel Valdes shared his concerns and suggested that a joint approach be made to the Prime Minister to make an intervention with the CEP admonishing them to make a more conscientious effort in order to succeed at the task at hand. Modeste thought that an approach to the CEP from the Conseil des Sages would be more appropriate.

14. (C) Modeste also raised concern regarding the performance of the MINUSTAH Elections Support Unit. He opined that during the negotiations for the UN-OAS Memorandum of Understanding the UN had not realized the magnitude and dimension that an electoral process in Haiti entailed. However, he went on to mention that the recent sub-contracting of UNOPS for several aspects of the implementation, especially regarding security, was a positive step.

15. (C) Comment: Initial indications are that Spehar is a good fit for the critical position of OAS elections support chief. The concerns raised by the OAS regarding the CEP's deficiencies are well-taken and, indeed, have been of concern to Post. We also agree that Duchemin is the most conscientious and diligent among the CEP members. End comment.
FOLEY